

**Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Mule Deer Working Group (MDWG)**

MDWG Mission Statement: “Serve the WGFD and its constituents to develop knowledge and management strategies to conserve Wyoming’s mule deer and their habitats.”



Joshua Mule Deer Painting

Wyoming Game and Fish Department Mule Deer Working Group (MDWG)

Background Information: The Wyoming Game and Fish Department Mule Deer Working Group was organized in December 1997. The first MDWG meeting was held in April 1998 and the group has been active ever since. Activity and accomplishment summary information is arranged from most recent to past actions in the material that follows. Major reports and management recommendations and accomplishments are attached after the activity and accomplishment summary. Lastly, links for additional deer associated information is included for those interested in Wyoming's mule deer.

Last Updated: December 2013

Current Members: Daryl Lutz, Chairman, Bill Gerhart, Vice Chairman, Dan Thiele, , Bill Robertson, Joe Bohne, Gary Fralick, Jill Randall, Steve Tessmann, Grant Frost, Bill Brinegar, Adam Hymas, Justin Binfet, Jeff Short, Will Schultz, Scott Gamo and Tim Woolley.

Past Members: Rick Straw, Neil Hymas, Ron Iverson, Carrie Dobey, Carol Havelik, Tom Easterly, John Hyde, Irah Leonetti and Dan Stroud.

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Dates

Activity and Accomplishment Summary

8/5-6/13 **18th meeting.** The focus of the meeting was development of resident region licenses CONCEPT and review of draft mule deer habitat management guidelines for Wyoming. Other items discussed and presented included: updates on the Wyoming Range and the Platte Valley mule deer initiatives, updates on research associated with the Wyoming Range mule deer carrying capacity study, and updates on current mule deer management in the state recommended by the MDWG and being implemented by Wildlife Administration. Josh Coursey, Muley Fanatics Foundation, Rock Springs, WY. was a guest and presented information on the foundations formation, mission and goals and projects they are currently funding and providing volunteer assistance to complete. Jill has prepared draft mule deer habitat management guidelines for Wyoming. Review comments, clarification and refinements on habitat types, additional photos and maps and scales were assigned to various members to forward to Jill by the end of November 2013. Jill will incorporate review comments in a revised draft by December 31, 2013. Steve will do a technical edit by January 31, 2014. External agency personnel review will be solicited in February 2014. Gary provided update on the Wyoming Range mule deer initiative as well as Monteith's, WY COOP Unit, research activities as well as various studies with collared deer being conducted around the state and population assessment methodology focused primarily on sightability and cohort survivability. Jill provided information on EA process she

Wyoming Game and Fish Department Mule Deer Working Group (MDWG)

is working on that includes approximately 40,000 acres of habitat improvements identified on BLM lands in the Wyoming Range mule deer herd unit. Will provided an update on the Platte Valley mule deer initiative, sightability information and population estimates, Platte Valley Habitat Partnership status and potential habitat projects in the valley. Much effort and time was spent on developing the resident region concept and addressing the potential pros and cons associated with the concept. Daryl will draft a report and send to MDWG 8/9/13 for review and comments back to Daryl by 8/16/13. Daryl will send the final to Wildlife Administration 8/20/13 and work on a final presentation for the Supervisor's meeting in Cody September 3-5, 2013.

1/14-15/13 17th meeting. A number of items were discussed by the group. The mission statement formally adopted and approved by Wildlife Division Administration follows: **“Serve the WGFD and its constituents to develop knowledge and management strategies to conserve Wyoming’s mule deer and their habitats.”** Tim and Daryl will review literature on the minimum buck ratios impacting fawn production and/or pregnancy and fetal rates. Jill and Daryl will provide a brief synopsis and recommendations for mule deer habitat treatments following WAFWA Habitat Guidelines for Wyoming. Jeff and Jill will provide literature citations relative to the importance of mule deer body conditions entering the winter in determining survival rates across sex and age classes and fawn production the following year. The group will also investigate information being collected on herbaceous species responses in beetle-killed conifer stands for Jill, Jeff and Tim to assimilate by 2/28/13 with a draft prepared by 3/15/13. Daryl and Will and perhaps Jeff plan to attend the 2013 deer/elk workshop in Missoula, MT. Justin developed a template requiring all Chapter 33 permit holders with marked big game animals to report how many marked animals by sex and age were alive on January 1 of each year and how many remained above as of December 31 of that year. He submitted it to Mike Choma and Carol Havlik for review and eventual adoption. Jill discussed shrub monitoring procedures with the group. Susan Boston presented information on the hunter attitude survey and much discussion followed relative to preference versus tolerance for hunting season structure and limited quota versus general opportunities. The MDWG will begin developing a position paper on hunting season structure for Division Administrative review that will cover a number of topics including thresholds for converting from general to limited quota; habitat issues as they pertain to fawn production/survival and current carry capacity; pros and cons of general and limited quota seasons; and how the limited quota season can result in unreasonable trophy management expectations. Recommendations were also made to collect antler point and spread measurements on the harvest survey. The group will solicit input on areas that should or could be converted to limited quota with minimal impact.

4/30-5/1/12 16th meeting. A draft mission statement for the MDWG was finalized for administrative review. The draft mission adopted for the WGFD's Mule Deer Working Group is to “Serve the WGFD and its constituents to develop knowledge

Wyoming Game and Fish Department Mule Deer Working Group (MDWG)

and management strategies to conserve Wyoming's mule deer and their habitats." One of the meeting focuses was providing new group members a historical review and current status of the MDWG along with a general discussion of future goals including recommendation on 'index' herds; integration of habitat and population management, data collection consistency; sightability and population monitoring; I&E and public outreach and input; reviews of research proposals, future update of 'Mule Deer of Wyoming' book to include an impact section; and finalization for the Platte Valley mule deer initiative and status of the Platte Valley Habitat Partnership. Susan Boston gave an update and solicited input from the group on upcoming mule deer hunter survey with comments due 5/10/12. Binfit will post updated mule deer library information on the intranet. Population data collection and recommendations along with 'Key' herds is being led by Short among others. Antler class data collection standardization recommendations will be drafted by Fralick and Binfet. Shrub utilization standardization recommendations will be led by Randall. Kevin Monteith and other personnel from the Wyoming Coop Unit gave an update on current and proposed research to establish a nutritionally based carrying capacity for the Wyoming Range mule deer herd. In addition, much discussion was held relative to the new spreadsheet modeling efforts, population data collection needs and development of habitat data collection parameters and habitat treatment prescriptions. We also discussed the need to revise and update the MDWG web site. Various assignments were made to begin drafting ideas for future refinement and consideration as noted above.

6/1-2/11 **15th meeting.** The meeting focused on addressing declining mule deer populations, options for more conservative hunting seasons and public expectations. Discussions of trigger points, thresholds and consequences of general any deer, general antlered deer only, antler point restrictions, limited quota seasons, general resident region licenses management options and doe/fawn harvest were discussed along with financial impacts, hunter recruitment and retention and hunter overcrowding perceptions. Various assignments to compile information and future refinement along with draft recommendations were made for administrative review.

9/13-14/08 **14th meeting.** This meeting focused on the updates to the Wyoming Mule Deer Initiative Plan to include the addition of a section on supplemental feeding and progress and initiation of Mule Deer Initiative Plans for the Wyoming Range and Platte Valley mule deer herds. Regional WGFD personnel involved with management of the Wyoming Range mule deer herd and development of the plan following public meetings input attended and provided input, insight and recommended actions and needs. The status and progress on mule deer habitat assessments contracted to Teton Science School (TSS) within the Wyoming Range and Platte Valley herds was presented by Brenda Younkin, TSS. Short and Fralick presented material on mule deer population estimation techniques and sightability analysis following Idaho's aerial survey methods. Susan Boston presented the Wyoming Range mule deer attitude survey and recommendations for a statewide mule deer hunter attitude survey (last conducted in 2005) scheduled for February

Wyoming Game and Fish Department Mule Deer Working Group (MDWG)

2009. Erik Kessler updated the group on statewide I&E efforts regarding mule deer.

- 7/7/07** The final draft Wyoming Mule Deer Initiative Plan was presented by Lutz at the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission meeting and was adopted by the Commission.
- 6/11-12/07** **13th meeting.** This meeting focused on incorporation of public comments following the Commission presentation on the draft Wyoming Mule Deer Initiative Plan for internal Department administrative review prior to presentation of a final plan to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission July 2007 meeting. In addition, progress on updating the Mule Deer of Wyoming book, the mule deer booth at the Hunting and Fishing EXPO in Casper for September 2007, additional research updates from Fralick and the upcoming attendance at the Deer/Elk work shop.
- 9/13-14/06** **12th meeting.** This meeting focused on development of the Wyoming Mule Deer Initiative and assignment of the various sections to MDWG members. Time frames for this endeavor follow: initial MDWG drafts by 9/26/06, reviews and return to Lutz for compilation by 10/20/06, reviews and final drafts for Department review by 12/1/06 and final draft for Commission consideration by 12/31/06. MDWG members responsible for the various sections include: 1) population management- Tessman and Fralick; 2) habitat management – Straw and Gerhart; 3) predation – Bohne; 4) Disease and parasites – Woolley; 5) law enforcement – Robertson; 6) weather- Thiele; 7) elk/deer interactions – Robertson; 8) I&E – Erick Kessler; 9) research needs – Fralick; 10) funding and support – Bill Rudd and John Emmerich; and 11) compilation, introduction and summary – Lutz.
- 12/8/05** **11th meeting.** The meeting discussed and focused on the upcoming Wyoming Deer Hunter Survey, hunting season frameworks to attain and maintain population objectives to address hunter perception of overcrowding, outline for updating the Wyoming Mule Deer Management Plan book and the Wyoming Mule Deer Initiative and brochure and updating the mule deer traveling display. Gerhart gave an overview of the status of the travel display due in February 2006. Hunter crowding draft information will be presented at the Wildlife Supervisor's meeting scheduled for January 24, 2006 and the statewide mule deer management plan information will be presented to Wildlife Division Administration on 12/20/2005.
- 8/8-9/05** **10th meeting.** The meeting focused on discussion of development of a comprehensive statewide mule deer strategic plan. John Emmerich presented expectation and need for information on management and maintenance strategies for maintaining hunting quality and opportunity. Recommendations are due to John by 12/31/05. Thiele gave an overview of the 6th Deer/Elk Workshop. Tessman presented material compiled by Biological Services and forwarded to John Emmerich regarding the Weather Severity Index with a draft due for review by the Wildlife Management Coordinator's meeting August 26, 2005. Tessman, Fralick, Leonetti and Woolley gave an update on mule deer hunt area and herd unit summaries and will prepare a draft by 11/30/05. Mule deer migration barrier and route information is being compiled for Bill Rudd. Draft outlines for the mule deer management plan are being compiled by Woolley and Lutz. Fralick gave an update on the research being conducted by WEST, Inc. on the Sublette mule deer herd response to energy development activities. Bob Meulengracht, MDF,

Wyoming Game and Fish Department Mule Deer Working Group (MDWG)

presented MDF information. Much of the meeting was devoted to presentations by Rick Kahn from Colorado Division of Wildlife regarding Colorado's Mule Deer Population analysis procedures. Hal Sawyer presented Sublette Mule Deer Study results. Tessman presented data on hunt area statistics compiled by him and Dobey. Leonetti and Woolley were appointed to the MDWG.

- 7/20/04** **9th meeting.** Meeting focus was discussion of development of best management practices, research priorities, population analysis techniques, CWD, and energy development concerns. Easterly resigned from group as he has been appointed to Bighorn Basin Local Sage Grouse Working Group.
- 1/8/04** **8th meeting.** A variety of topics were discussed at this meeting. Lutz updated the group on WAFWA projects and difficulties in engaging federal land managers. The group revisited expectations and goals and discussed habitat management, research I&E, disease issues, cheatgrass issues and shrub utilization and a shrub utilization index developed in the Casper Region. Draft BMPs are being prepared by Straw, Easterly and Fralick for review in June 2004 and refinement in January 2005. We will refine the habitat and population management guidelines and shrub use standards and compare POP II and quadrat population modeling by January 2005. A report of CBM effects on mule deer and the effects of antler point restrictions are being prepared for the winter of 2005
- 2/12/03** New working members added and others resigned. New members were Bill Robertson, Tom Easterly and Gary Fralick.
- 2003** Chapters co-authored by Lutz and Stroud for the WAFWA book titled: 'Mule Deer Conservation: Issues and Management Strategies.'
- 5/21-23/03** Western States and Provinces deer and elk workshop hosted by MDWG in Jackson, WY. Program and abstracts procedure published and edited by Tessman Fall 2003. Most of the MDWG assisted with and attended the meeting.
- 12/10/02** Lutz developed a spreadsheet of Wyoming mule deer literature. Tessman collected and documented educational material and popular articles published in WW and WWN.
- 10/28/02** Lutz prepared a PowerPoint presentation for the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission relative to status of Mule Deer in Wyoming.
- 7/10-11/02** **7th meeting.** The primary topic of discussion were the management guidelines, Lutz update on the status and progress for the Deer/Elk Workshop to be hosted in Jackson, Wyoming May21-21, 2003 and the WAFWA mule deer group activities. The MDWG will have a booth at the Hunting and Fishing EXPO in Casper in September 2002. Bob Lanka gave an update on what other states are doing relative to deer population census techniques and disease monitoring. The group toured and discussed Platte Valley mule deer herd unit to look at habitat changes over the past 30 years. The tour was led by Dale Strickland, Joe Bohne and Rick Straw. Carol Havlik announced she had to resign due to other work commitments.
- 10/24/01** Dan Stroud appointed to MDWG to replace Neil Hymas.
- 8/21-22/01** **6th meeting.** Lutz summarized the Portland Deer/Elk workshop meeting. Wyoming will host the workshop May 20-23, 2003 in Jackson, Wyoming. Hymas and Lockwood with assistance from Lucy Diggins prepared an I&E brochure titled: 'More Buck for Your Shrub'. Hymas resigned from group due to regular

Wyoming Game and Fish Department Mule Deer Working Group (MDWG)

job work load. Lockwood conducted a tour of the Nugget Canyon Highway Underpasses and the Cumberland Allotment.

John McCleary and Stroud conducted a tour of the Martin Ranch Mule Deer Demonstration Area. The group also discussed the need to work on the “Wyoming Mule Deer Management Guidelines” draft for the winter 2002 meeting.

- 1/25/01** **5th meeting.** Lutz gave an update on WAFWA mule deer group activities and also co-authored the WAFWA mule deer publication titled ‘Deer Predator Chapter of the Mule Deer Conservation: Issues and Management Strategies’. Our meeting was held in conjunction with a sagebrush systems and species workshop with presentation by Alma Winward and Larry Bennett. Updates were provided on the education and outreach efforts by Iverson, WGFD Wildlife Division Techniques Manual mule deer section rewrite by Thiel and Tessman and the internet site by Gerhart. We also discussed status of the deer migration and bottlenecks, seasonal ranges and population analysis materials being assembled for future consideration.
- 5/4/00** **4th meeting.** Lutz updated group on WAFWA mule deer projects. Hal Sawyer, Wyo. Coop Unit discussed reports compiled by the Coop Unit titled: (1) Preliminary Assessment of Mule Deer Population Dynamics in Wyoming and (2) Ecology of Sympatric Mule Deer and White-tailed Deer in Riparian Communities of Southeast Wyoming as well as research addressing mule deer response to oil and gas development being conducted in the Sublette Mule Deer Herd Study involving collared deer. Martin Ranch Mule Deer demonstration area was discussed by Gary Butler, Stroud, and John McCleary. Hymas and Iverson updated the group on the status of the Education Program. The group toured the Clyce and Myrtle McCulloch Ranch in the Richeau Hills where Larry Bennett and Ryan Amundson are using prescribed fire to benefit mule deer.
- 9/9/99** Research topics were discussed with Stan Anderson of the Wyoming Coop Unit at UW and Larry Bennett. Hymas outlined an education program and will prepare a trust fund to rewrite Larry Bennett’s white paper. Thiel took the lead on the mule deer section rewrite of the WGFD Wildlife Division Techniques Manual with Tessman.
- 12/1/98** **3rd meeting.** The group discussed habitat issues and federal land management coordination concerns and strategies to engage federal land managers in mule deer management. Larry Bennett discussed general statewide shrub conditions and trends. Lutz has compiled a mule deer literature library which is available at the Casper Regional Office. He also gave an update on the WAFWA mule deer group activities. Shrub conditions and trend sub-committee of Tessman, Gerhart and Straw appointed to develop a draft progress report by 1/30/99.
- 7/9/98** Lutz prepared a statewide Mule Deer Management Summary for Director Terry Cleveland for Wyoming Game and Fish Commissioner Hal Corbett.
- 5/28/98** **2nd meeting.** The MDWG attended a joint meeting with the Bighorn Sheep and Sage Grouse Working Groups. Jay Lawson discussed expectations, membership, and direction of the working groups.
- 4/22/98** **1st meeting.** This was the inaugural meeting of the MDWG. Jay Lawson provided purpose and guidance for the group. Doug McWhirter and Kevin Hurley representing the Bighorn Sheep Working Group provided development process and structure. The MDWG established some assignments and short- and long-

Wyoming Game and Fish Department Mule Deer Working Group (MDWG)

goals and timelines. Short-term goals included: 1) assimilation of historical information on herd unit populations trends, develop herd unit summaries and habitat trends and information; and 2) create a mule deer literature database including mule deer associated project reports. Long-term goals included: 1) research needs, 2) budget needs for mule deer management; and 3) personnel needs for mule deer management. I&E articles to get the message out to our constituents is critical to the long-term success. Herd unit summaries will be prepared with one of our first focuses on habitat issues. Wyoming will host the 2003 Deer/Elk workshop in Jackson, Wyoming. Lutz discussed the 10th WAFWA Mule Deer group meeting held in Reno May 27-29, 1998.

12/12/97

Following personnel calls for interest, volunteers, and input Jay Lawson, Wildlife Division Chief, formed the Mule Deer Working Group with Chair-Daryl Lutz, Vice Chair-Bill Gerhart, members Neil Hymas, Ron Iverson, Joe Bohne, Dan Thiel, Rick Straw, John Hyde, Carol Havlik, and Steve Tessman. Lutz is also the Department representative on the WAFWA mule deer group.



Mule Deer Buck

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Major Reports, Management Recommendations and Accomplishments: